

SERMON NOTES

Dr. David A. Renwick -- January 31, 2010

Probing Questions I: Predestination: Puppets on a String?
Romans 8:28-32, 38-39; John 3:16, 10:14-16, 22-30

Writings, Articles connected to the Sermon

Clockwork Image: Christian Perspective on Science, Donald M.

Mackay (1997) (late Prof Neuroscience, Keele Univ., England)

“Francis Collins: The Scientist as Believer,” Feb 2007

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0702/voices.html>

“How to Cope with Creeping Mechanism,” Thomas W. Clark
Sept 2007, <http://www.naturalism.org/determin.htm>

Human Nature: Reflections on the Integration of Psychology and Christianity, Malcolm Jeeves (Prof Emeritus Psychology, St Andrews Univ., Scotland), 2006.

Institutes of the Christian Religion, John Calvin, Book 3: Chs 21-24

Playing God, Genetic Determinism and Human Freedom, Ted Peters, 1997

“Genetic Determinism,” <http://www.enotes.com/science-religion-encyclopedia/genetic-determinism/print>

The Reason for God, “How Can a Loving God send People to Hell?”
Timothy Keller, 2008

Definition: Predestination = *pre(determined)destination*:

our ‘destination’ has been predetermined by someone or something else.
E.g. *Genetics, Social Environment, God, etc.*

Emotional Reaction:

Like it or not? Usual response is ‘not’!

Like it or not? **It’s in the Bible** – but not often: only in the following
4 passages – (Greek = *pro-oridzo*)

Acts 4:26-28

The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers have gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah.’ 27For in this city, in fact, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, 28to do whatever your hand and your plan had **predestined** to take place.

Romans 8:29,30

For those whom he foreknew he also **predestined** to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. 30And those whom he **predestined** he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

1 Corinthians 2:7

But we speak (*of Christ, who is*) God’s wisdom, secret and hidden, which God **decreed** (= **predestined**) before the ages for our glory.

Ephesians 1:5,11

5He (**pre**)**destined** us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will; 11In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been (**pre**)**destined** according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will

Other Words Similar to Predestination used more frequently

= *destine, choose, elect, plan*

GOD CHOSE ISRAEL: For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has **chosen** you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession. – Deuteronomy 7:6

JESUS CHOSE HIS DISCIPLES: I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have **chosen**. – John 13:18

JESUS SAID: For many are called, but few are **chosen**.” (Matthew 22:14);

You did not **choose** me but I **choose** you. (John 15:6)

PAUL SAYS: (God) **chose** us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. (Ephesians 1:4)

Problem: Predestination and Free Will

1. Does God’s predestining eliminate free choice? And thus the validity of moral choice/accountability?
2. Is it fair that God should choose to send anyone to hell – especially if they had no choice?

Problem: Predestination and Hell:

Miroslav Volf (see Keller, p. 74)

If God were not angry at injustice and deception and did not make a final end to violence – that God would not be worthy of worship.

Czeslaw Milosz (pronounced: *Chefwaf Meewosh*), Keller, p.75

A true opium of the people is a belief in nothingness after death – the huge solace of thinking that our betrayals, greed, cowardice, murders are not going to be judged . . . [but] all religions recognize that our deeds are imperishable.

Problems: The Genetic Revolution

The Problem of determinism is a problem for discussion and human nature whether we believe in God or not!! – especially with the genetic revolution.

Collins' Response: *Genetics does not determine choice, though it influences or limits choice. Otherwise identical twins would be . . . completely identical!*

The Biblical View

Human Choice

1. The first and foundational story in the Bible is about choice
Adam and Eve (Genesis 2)
2. Human Choice is critical throughout the Bible
Moses (Deuteronomy 30:19-20) 'choose life'
Jesus (John 3:16) 'whoever believes'
Paul (Philippians 2:12) 'work out your salvation'
Last Book (Revelation 3:20)
'if anyone opens the door, I'll come in'

God's Choice

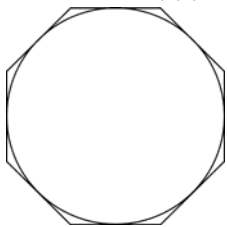
1. God's choice precedes our choice
God chooses to Create us, whether we want to be created or not! We have no choice in the matter (Genesis 1)
2. God's/Jesus' Choice is critical throughout the Bible
God chooses Israel (Deuteronomy 7:6) 'You I have chosen'
Jesus chooses his disciples – John 13:18
(Matt. 22:14) 'Many are called, but few are chosen'
(John 15:6) 'You did not choose me, but I chose you'
Paul: (Ephesians 1:4) God chooses us
'before the foundation of the world'

An Unresolved Conundrum! A Mystery!

. . . the Bible lives with this (and so do I!)

A Conundrum can be Scientific (or Mathematical!)

. . . how many straight lines in a circle?



The Biblical Importance of Predestination (Romans 8, John 14)

1. Our (pre-) Destination **is** our full redemption in the image and into the Presence of Christ: that is, when the word 'predestination' is used in the Bible it never refers to God's choice for us of heaven or hell, **but of God's decision to complete his work in us.**
2. God's will/ choice is not capricious or arbitrary: *the one who predestines is always the same as the one who sends Christ to us, who loves to be a Redeemer and Savior*
3. God's choice of us is stronger than our choice of God
= God's faithfulness to us is stronger than our faith in God
. . . thank God!!

PREVENIENT GRACE (Methodists claim not to believe in predestination, but what John Wesley called 'prevenient grace' provides a wonderful definition of what I as a Presbyterians believe!!)

We acknowledge God's prevenient grace, the divine love that surrounds all humanity and precedes any and all of our conscious impulses. This grace prompts our first wish to please God, our first glimmer of understanding concerning God's will, and our "first slight transient conviction" of having sinned against God. God's grace also awakens in us an earnest longing for deliverance from sin and death and moves us toward repentance and faith.
(The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2000).

JOHN CALVIN

Even though our forefather, John Calvin, believed that predestination involved God's choice of who went to heaven, and who went to hell, he warned his readers to treat the matter with humility: *'let us not be ashamed to be ignorant in this matter wherein there is a certain learned ignorance.'*
Institutes. 3:21.1

SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION (1561)

We Are to Have a Good Hope for All.

And although God knows who are his, and here and there mention is made of the small number of elect, yet we must hope well of all, and not rashly judge any man to be a reprobate. For Paul says to the Philippians, "I thank my God for you all" (now he speaks of the whole Church in Philippi), "because of your fellowship in the Gospel, being persuaded that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is also right that I have this opinion of you all" (Phil. 1:3 ff.).